



October 1, 2014

New Hampshire INSTRUCTION 180-15-1 – NH NRCS SPOT CHECKING PROCEDURES

PURPOSE

This document outlines spot checking procedures that will be used in New Hampshire. Policy for spot checking is found in GM 450, Part 407, Subpart C. New Hampshire reviewers will spot check a minimum of 5 percent of all practices certified in a fiscal year. This includes agronomic, engineering and planning practices (CAP's). Additional spot checks may be done when determined necessary by the State Conservationist. Practices may be spot checked throughout the year. This is encouraged when recently constructed/installed practices are observed during field visits and for practices such as cover crops and conservation tillage that can only be observed during certain seasons of the year.

A. State Office

Roles and responsibilities for spot check activities are identified for Leadership Team members on Attachment A.

1. Practice Selection. For spot checking of practices certified the previous fiscal year and to ensure that adequate practices are spot checked, the ASTC-Operations, in conjunction with the ASTC-Programs, SRC, and SCE, will determine which practice installations will be selected for, Agronomy, Biology, Forestry, and Engineering reviews. These selections will be made during the first full week of October. Additional practices may be selected by the ASTC-Operations, as needed, for spot checking in order to capture the sample size needed to meet policy or address concerns identified by the State Conservationist. Practices selected may be installed under any NRCS program, including WRP, and where technical assistance was provided by NRCS employees or Technical Service Providers (TSP's). The TSP Coordinator will assist the ASTC-Operations in selecting practices installed by TSP's and coordinate with the DC's to ensure that the work of all TSP's is reviewed according to policy.
2. Scheduling Reviews. The ASTC-Operations will coordinate and schedule spot checks in field offices.
3. Conducting Reviews. The SRC, SCE and Technical Specialists, as necessary, will conduct spot checks installed and certified by NRCS employees. The TSP Coordinator is the lead reviewer for TSP certified practices. The TSP Coordinator will request assistance from the SRC or SCE where specialized expertise or higher EJAA is needed.
4. Follow-up Activities. The ASTC-Operations and the ASTC-Programs follow-up with field staff to ensure that deficiencies identified on New Hampshire NRCS Spot Check Form, Attachment B, during spot checks are corrected and appropriate action is taken to prevent future occurrences of the problem. The ASTC-Operations will follow-up quarterly with DC's and the TSP Coordinator. The ASTC-Programs will follow-up quarterly with the WRP Team Leader. Supporting documentation and recommended actions will be



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provided to the State Conservationist (STC). If appropriate, program non-compliance issues will be addressed by the ASTC for Programs.

B. Field Office

1. The roles and responsibilities of District Conservationists, the WRP Team Leader, and the TSP Coordinator are identified in Attachment A. The DC is responsible for coordinating field visits and field office participation for spot checks in his or her field office area. The DC is responsible for correcting deficiencies on all practices, except WRP and TSP practices, identified during field office reviews. The DC also provides quarterly updates to the ASTC-Operations on progress in addressing identified deficiencies in his or her Field Office.

The WRP Team Leader and TSP Coordinator participate in all WRP and TSP spot checks, respectively, and are responsible for ensuring that corrective actions are taken on all deficiencies identified during spot checks. These individuals provide quarterly progress reports to the ASTC-Operations with copies to the ASTC-Programs for WRP deficiencies.

C. TSP Practices/Conservation Activity Plans

1. The TSP Spot Check Reviews for field offices will be selected by the ASTC-Operations from a list of CAP plans and TSP designed/installed/certified practices. Selection of TSP practices by the ASTC-Operations will be based on Protract reports (CAP's) and knowledge of the field staff (TSP designed/installed/certified practices). Spot checks of TSPs will follow National Policy (GM-Title 450, Part 407, Subpart C), which requires spot checks on 10% of practices for the first three years and on 5% thereafter.

D. Spot Checking Procedure

1. In cases where several disciplines overlap, combining spot checks is encouraged.
2. At a minimum, engineering and ecological science spot checks will include at least one NRCS field office employee and the spot check reviewer.
3. For TSP spot checks, field office participation is encouraged, but not mandatory. The TSP Coordinator doing the spot check will request the field office to phone the participant/landowner and inform them of the need for a site visit for a TSP spot check. The spot check reviewer will then coordinate dates/times with the participant/landowner, the TSP and the DC. It is not required that the landowner/participant, DC or TSP be present for the spot check. However, some practices will require that the landowner or TSP be present unless GPS coordinates are available to locate practices. The final form will be submitted to the ASTC-Operations with copies to the DC.
4. Practices to be spot checked will be selected by the Leadership Team (See B. 1. above). This will include engineering, ecological science, CAP's and practices designed, installed and certified by a TSP.
5. Field visits are crucial and should be incorporated in the review process whenever possible. In cases where field visits are not feasible, the spot check reviewer will rely on photographic evidence and field office documentation to inspect the practice. The spot check reviewer may also interview the producer as a means to determine practice installation details.



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6. Items to be reviewed during a spot check include, but are not limited to those listed on the NH Spot Check Form, Attachment B.

7. The spot check findings will be recorded on the NH Spot Check Form, Attachment B. The persons performing the spot check and the DC's signatures are required on the Spot Check Form for NRCS employee applied practices. This form will record the following:

a. Commendations: Are to be given for high quality planning, documentation, design or installation of a practice or practices that address resource concerns and satisfy customer's needs.

b. Recommendations: Are made on practices where the field staff can improve their work, but were not in violation of NRCS policy and practice met minimum standard and specifications.

c. Action Items: Areas where practice installation was substandard or NRCS policy was violated and immediate corrective action is required. The ASTC - Operations will monitor the FO spot check deficiency reports and send out reminders to responsible persons quarterly until corrective actions are completed.

8. Whenever possible, a "Summary of Findings" will be discussed with the DC by the spot check reviewer on the day of the office/field quality review and will include Commendations, Recommendations and Action Items. At a minimum the person performing the spot check and the DC will be present for the summation. Within 15 days after the review, completed spot check forms will be transmitted by cover letter from the ASTC-Operations to the DC.

9. ASTC for Operations will negotiate completion dates of Action Items with each DC for work completed by NRCS employees. The DCs will provide follow-up documentation to ASTC for Operations quarterly until work is completed. The ASTC-Operations will verify that the Action Items have been completed with random checks of completed work. This will occur during Performance Reviews, Operation Reviews or other Field Office visits. The ASTC - Programs performs this function for spot checks of WRP practices.

10. The TSP Coordinator will negotiate completion dates of Action Items for work completed by TSPs and will post to a statewide Action Register.

11. Urgent items will be addressed immediately or according to agreed upon deadlines. In cases where program policy violation is suspected, DC and ASTC-Operations will consult with ASTC - Programs.

Contact the ASTC-Operations for questions on Spot Checking Procedures. Questions on conservation planning and ecological science practices are to be addressed to the SRC and engineering questions to the SCE.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard P. Ellsmore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Richard" and last name "Ellsmore" clearly distinguishable.

Richard P. Ellsmore
State Conservationist – New Hampshire



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[Attachment A](#)

[Attachment B](#)